United Nations A/62/341

General Assembly

Distr.: General
14 September 2007

Original: English

Sixty-second session
Item 63 of the provisional agenda*
Towards global partnerships

Enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

Strategic engagement with the private sector and other stakeholders is proving to be an effective method for advancing United Nations goals, particularly development goals. United Nations-business engagement has evolved based on an understanding that although the goals of the Organization are quite distinct from those of the private sector, there are overlapping objectives. Additionally, there is a growing recognition that many of the world's most pressing problems are too complex for any one sector to face alone. Thus, since the 1990s, the private sector and other stakeholders have increasingly become active partners in helping the Organization achieve its goals, as a complement to Government action. Prior reports, as well as General Assembly resolution 60/215, have proposed wide-ranging recommendations to increase the scale, effectiveness and accountability of United Nations-business engagement, as well as to ensure Organization integrity and brand surrounding these relationships. Over the last two years, important steps have been taken to respond to this reform agenda, both at the level of individual agencies, funds and programmes and at the system level. Given the extensive and expanding nature of these relationships, there remains significant room for further strengthening, specifically in the areas of training, building institutional capacity in country offices, strategic focus and local ownership, sharing of best practices, partner selection processes, streamlining of guidelines and impact assessment. Increased caretaking of the United Nations-business relationship is required to ensure that the appropriate support and focus are provided to implement recommended actions. The support of the General Assembly remains critical for carrying forward and strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and the private sector in a manner that can best help to achieve United Nations goals.

* A/62/150.

** The present report was submitted late due to additional technical and substantive consultations.

07-50671 (E) 081007

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 60/215, in which the Assembly requested that the Secretary-General submit a report at its sixty-second session on the implementation of the proposed modalities for enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector.

2. Three previous reports of the Secretary-General have dealt with cooperation between the United Nations and relevant partners (A/56/323, A/58/227 and A/60/214). The present report builds on the previous reports and provides an overview of recent trends in relationships between the United Nations and the private sector.[1]

3. The General Assembly has stressed repeatedly that effective relationships between the United Nations and the private sector can contribute to the achievement of United Nations goals, particularly internationally agreed development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals. To harness the full potential of private sector contributions to the work of the United Nations while safeguarding the integrity and reputation of the Organization, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General in resolution 60/215 to take action in seven key areas: the promotion of adequate training at all concerned levels; building institutional capacity in country offices; strategic focus and local ownership; the sharing of best practices; the improvement of partner selection processes; the streamlining of United Nations guidelines for partnerships between the United Nations and all relevant partners, including the private sector; and the promotion of impact assessment mechanisms.

4. Over the last two years, the United Nations has taken important steps to respond to this reform agenda at the level of individual agencies, funds and programmes. In addition, the Organization as a whole has taken concrete steps to strengthen cooperation with the private sector and has facilitated system-wide efforts to increase the scale, effectiveness and accountability of relationships with business.

5. Many agencies, funds and programmes have taken important steps to enhance their capacity to work with the private sector in support of United Nations goals, for example, by developing a strategic approach to partnering and by enhancing the capacity of their country offices to reach out to the private sector. While most United Nations entities are optimistic about the potential of partnerships to contribute to their mission, many are not yet able to demonstrate full success. The challenge for these organizations is to complete the development of a fully strategic approach to partnering with the private sector. Further actions are necessary to enable agencies, funds and programmes to leverage their institutional strengths and comparative advantages. At the same time, they need to improve the mechanisms for safeguarding integrity and protecting reputation and brand. This requires each United Nations entity that has not yet done so to develop a coherent strategy for its engagement with the private sector.

[1] This report is based on a review of the relevant literature in this area as well as a scoping exercise and information obtained through a Private Sector Focal Point questionnaire completed by 49 offices from 22 different United Nations agencies, funds and programmes; 18 in-depth follow-up interviews with staff members also served as important sources of information, as did 14 brief case studies.

6. At the system level, the Global Compact Office has been a catalyst for expanding system-wide cooperation with business. The Global Compact has succeeded in showing the value of the Organization's mission to thousands of businesses from over 100 countries through its 10 principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and fighting corruption. Internally, it has played a leading role in strengthening relations with the private sector in the areas outlined in General Assembly resolution 60/215.

7. The Global Compact Leaders Summit, held at the United Nations in Geneva in July 2007, underscored a strong shared interest in further building relations between the United Nations, the private sector and other stakeholders, and exhibited the ability of this cooperation to advance Organization goals.

8. A review of current practices reveals that the establishment and effectiveness of relationships between the United Nations, the private sector and other stakeholders varies greatly across the United Nations system. To realize the full potential of this rapidly intensifying cooperation, the United Nations will need to take appropriate steps within individual agencies, funds and programmes, as well as at the system level, to increase the scale, effectiveness and accountability of United Nations-business engagement, as well as to ensure the Organization's integrity and brand surrounding these relationships.

II. The evolving United Nations: business relationship

9. During the past decade, cooperation between the United Nations and the private sector has seen tremendous growth. Engagement takes place at many levels. Almost all United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have a rising number of concrete engagements with businesses. The surge in partnership initiatives seen in the early days of this new phase of cooperation between the United Nations and business has given way to a more stable rate of expansion in recent years.

10. As identified in the last report of the Secretary-General, partnerships with the private sector fall into four broad categories: advocating United Nations values and goals, developing norms and standards, sharing and coordinating resources and expertise, and harnessing markets for development. Current practices reveal that United Nations agencies, funds and programmes continue to pursue partnerships with the private sector in these areas.

11. In advocacy partnerships, the United Nations engages the private sector in order to promote its goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Box 1
Advocacy partnerships

Nothing but Nets

The United Nations Foundation and United Nations Fund for International Partnerships work with a variety of corporate and charitable organizations on this grassroots awareness campaign to stop the spread of malaria in Africa. The campaign seeks to engage the public on the issue of malaria through an interactive website and other avenues open to the respective corporate and philanthropic partners. Nothing but Nets encourages supporters to form their own Netraiser team and recruit their family, friends, church, sports team and school in this important cause. Through the website, teams receive information about malaria and campaign toolkits, and learn how to organize events and raise awareness and funds for their cause.

Ninemillion.org

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is spearheading a campaign together with leading corporate partners from the sports apparel and software industries to raise awareness and funds for refugee children. To provide greater access to education and sports programmes to some 9 million children in refugee camps, the corporate partners have developed a website which they advertise widely. Through the website, users can access information, make direct donations or use a search function that triggers donations from a corporate partner. In less than one year, the campaign has raised over US$ 2 million. The funds are used by the United Nations Refugee Agency to support education, including HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, gender sensitivity and peace education programmes, as well as sports and play programmes emphasizing participation by girls.

Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development

The Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development is an inclusive, multi-stakeholder platform to promote the use of information and communication technologies to contribute to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals. Created by the Secretary-General and recognized by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development was launched in June 2006. The initiative currently engages in five flagship partnerships and advocacy initiatives to: accelerate connectivity and access for Africa; scale-up the telecentre movement; create a Cyber Development Corps based on south-south and triangular cooperation; promote assistive technologies for persons with disabilities; and advocate for free Internet access in schools.

12. Partnerships contributing to the development of norms and standards are one way for the United Nations to engage the private sector on a normative level. By working together to define concrete norms and standards, partnerships aim to increase voluntary compliance.

Box 2
Partnerships developing norms and standards

Sustainable Buildings and Construction Initiative

To enhance sustainability standards in the building and construction industry, the United Nations Environment Programme brings together construction companies, manufacturers, architects, estate developers and maintenance companies from all stages of the building process, along with local authorities, in a forum for discussion and change towards sustainability. Together, stakeholders identify opportunities to enhance these standards and will establish a global baseline for sustainability in the building and construction sector. The partners will also develop tools and strategies to help meet the new standards. Pilot projects in both developing and developed countries will demonstrate the value of sustainable environmental and social practices.

Principles for Responsible Investment

Convened by the Global Compact Office, the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative and a group of representatives from 20 institutional investors, Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) provides investors with a framework to take environmental, social and corporate governance issues into account in mainstream investment practices. One year after its launch, PRI counts 223 signatories with over US$ 10 trillion assets under management. The mission of the PRI Secretariat is to support implementation of the principles.

Task force on environmental requirements and market access

In 2004, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) created a multi-stakeholder platform connecting businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Governments to help developing countries cope with the new generation of environmental, health and food safety standards. This work is complemented by that of the UNCTAD-UNEP Capacity-building task force on trade, environment and development, which works with the private sector to set standards that promote the production and export of sustainable agricultural products in developing countries, such as the East African Organic Produce Standard of 2007.

Expert Group on International Standards of Accounting and Reporting

Created by the Economic and Social Council in 1982 and hosted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the International Standards of Accounting and Reporting helps developing countries implement best practices in corporate transparency. It coordinates cooperation between the public and private sector actors in creating tools and strategies to strengthen the accounting profession and facilitate investment flows.

13. In another model, partnerships between the United Nations and the private sector assist in sharing and coordinating resources and expertise, to the benefit of all involved organizations. Private partners contribute their special skills, knowledge or resources to support the implementation of United Nations programmes and activities.

Box 3
Partnerships sharing and coordinating resources and expertise

Child rights project in India

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and a major global furniture retailer partner for children's rights in Uttar Pradesh, known as the carpet belt of India, which serves as an important supplier region for the corporate partner. The initiative seeks to prevent and eliminate child labour in this region by tackling debt, poverty and the lack of access to education. Through a significant, long-term cash investment, the company has enabled UNICEF and the Government of India to reach 500 villages, benefiting a population of 1.08 million since 2001. The company will continue to support the expansion of the programme to all villages in the country over the next 5 to 10 years. The initiative has brought record numbers of children in the region to alternative learning centres which serve as a bridge to traditional primary schooling.

Every drop matters

In an effort to address water shortage issues in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) regional office in Bratislava has signed a five-year agreement with one of the largest beverage distributors in the world. Because the corporate partner relies on the efficient and sustainable use of water for its core business activities, managing this resource will play an important role in maintaining its strategic competitiveness. In this context, the partnership, initiated in May 2006, aims to provide a joint action plan for water-related programming with a particular focus on increased access to safe drinking water and facilitating the use of environmentally sound industrial technologies. The partnership plans to expand to Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan over the course of the initiative.

14. In a final model, the United Nations partners with business to support the development and expansion of sustainable markets locally, regionally and globally. There are two types of partnerships: partnerships that provide access to markets (e.g., producer networks) and partnerships that bridge or deepen markets (e.g., providing incentives for business to invest).

Box 4
Partnerships harnessing markets for development

Millennium Development Goal carbon initiative in China

With the support of one of the largest steel producers in the world, UNDP China has recently launched a carbon finance initiative to develop sustainable energy projects across less developed regions of western China. The cooperation is focused on fighting poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Over the project's three year duration, clean development mechanism project development centres will be established in 12 less developed provinces. Overall, the initiative intends to attract foreign investment to a previously neglected area, alleviate poverty through market solutions and create more sustainable paths for development in China.

Indian solar loan programme

Completed in May 2007, the main objective of the Indian solar loan programme was to help establish an Indian consumer credit market for financing solar home systems by assisting Indian banking partners to develop lending portfolios for these systems in poorly supplied regions of southern India. As a result of the programme, more than 16,000 households gained access to clean and reliable electric power. The market-based approach of the programme also led to the creation of a vibrant credit market for financing solar home systems. The initiative was the result of a partnership between UNEP, the UNEP Risoe Centre and two large Indian banks. Support for this programme was provided by the United Nations Foundation and the Shell Foundation through the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships.

Public-Private Alliance Foundation

Arising from the Public-Private Alliance for Rural Development of the Economic and Social Council, the Public-Private Alliance Foundation was established in 2006. In a collaborative effort involving individuals, groups, governments, NGOs, donors and businesses, this non-profit organization supports pro-poor business, stimulates entrepreneurial capacity-building and encourages investments, commerce and related activities for sustainable rural development. The Public-Private Alliance Foundation has been recognized by the Economic and Social Council, the Civil Society Development Forum. It is recipient of the Foundation of the Year Award from the National Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on Health. The Public-Private Alliance Foundation is currently engaged in several pilot projects, including assisting Dominican farmers to obtain

technical assistance and investment in fish farming; supporting the production of ethanol from sugar cane; and working with a solar energy company to identify installation and philanthropic opportunities. The Public-Private Alliance Foundation is also collaborating with the University of South Florida Patel Center to organize a subregional seminar on water challenges and opportunities in the Caribbean.

15. Today, partnerships complement the work of the United Nations in all areas, including all Millennium Development Goals and humanitarian relief efforts. A non-representative review of existing partnerships suggests that partnerships most frequently focus on Millennium Development Goal 1 (eradicating poverty and hunger), Millennium Development Goal 7 (ensuring environmental sustainability) and Millennium Development Goal 8 (developing a global partnership for development). In addition, a range of partnerships specialize in providing humanitarian aid, by leveraging private sector resources and expertise for humanitarian emergencies and disaster preparedness.

16. Existing partnerships between the United Nations and the private sector vary in their function, in the development goals addressed and in their size and composition. Partnerships most often include one to ten external partners from the private sector, local or national Governments and NGOs. Foundation involvement is much less frequent. Partnerships are initiated at Headquarters and locally by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. Groups of beneficiaries are included in evaluation processes more often than in day-to-day operations.

17. The majority of partnerships were reported to be of relatively short duration, most frequently lasting up to four years. A large number of partnerships, especially those initiated at the local or regional levels, have a budget of less than US$ 250,000. Partnerships initiated by Headquarters most commonly have a medium-sized budget of US$ 1 million to 10 million. The vast majority of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have allocated less than 10 per cent of their total funds for partnerships.

18. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes point to increasing satisfaction with the results of their partnership initiatives. In a survey conducted for this report, most entities indicated that they consider most of their partnership activities either very successful or somewhat successful. While they identified few partnership failures, most saw opportunities for improvement and for increasing the impact of partnerships. Many identified, for example, changes in key operational personnel, a lack of funding and logistical problems as impediments to partnership success.

19. It is important to note that United Nations agencies, funds and programmes reveal increasing variation with respect to their engagement with the private sector. For some entities, cooperation with the private sector and other partners has become a relatively standard and widespread practice. Others are cautiously engaging in first experiments, while some entities are still considering whether or not to embrace the partnership approach at all.

20. Differences in relationships with the private sector are rooted in the vastly different missions, governance structures and organizational functions of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. Various approaches to partnering should

therefore be expected. However, a process of strategic reflection and deliberation is necessary to allow each entity to define its optimal level and type of engagement with the private sector. Most United Nations agencies, funds and programmes see additional potential for relationships with the private sector and other stakeholders in the future, however many also anticipate that partnerships will remain a small yet significant part of their activities.

21. At the system level, the Global Compact has evolved into the premier global corporate citizenship initiative in the world, helping to project the values of the United Nations into the global marketplace. The Global Compact is a unique, global, public-private partnership with participation by over 4,200 businesses and other stakeholder groups, including civil society and labour organizations. Global Compact stakeholders are found in more than 100 countries, with over 50 per cent located in developing countries. Global Compact local networks exist or are emerging in approximately 80 countries, offering significant avenues to advance the initiative's ten principles on the ground.

22. In addition to engaging the business community, the Global Compact Office, through collaboration with numerous United Nations entities, including the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships and the United Nations System Staff College, has exercised leadership in strengthening relations with the private sector, in accordance with its mandate from the General Assembly. With a mission to advance United Nations values among the global business community and a public-private governance structure specifically tailored for diverse stakeholders, the Global Compact Office has proven to be uniquely positioned and capable of leading efforts to develop more strategic and effective relationships with the private sector.

23. The Global Compact Office has also promoted the internalization of its ten principles in the work of the United Nations. Progress has been made in the areas of procurement practices, pension fund policies, facilities management and human resource management. For example, the renovation of United Nations Headquarters is designed to reduce energy use drastically and minimize the Organization's carbon footprint. Additionally, the United Nations Joint Pension Fund has committed to the Principles for Responsible Investment. Further efforts are, however, necessary to ensure the continued implementation of the principles within the Organization.

24. The Global Compact Leaders Summit held in Geneva in July 2007 forcefully underscored the significance of the initiative and marked the beginning of a new era in the relationship between the United Nations and the private sector. Bringing together more than 1,100 committed leaders from business, Governments, labour, civil society and the United Nations to chart the way forward, the Summit also marked the launch of global and local initiatives in the areas of climate change, water management, investment and management education.

25. Through the Geneva Declaration issued at the Summit, meeting participants encouraged the Member States of the United Nations and the Secretary-General to continue their support for the Global Compact and uphold its position within the Organization.

26. At the Global Compact Leaders Summit, high-level representatives from 22 United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, including 6 heads, met to discuss ways to enhance collaboration with the private sector. They determined that the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination should consider

the future of the United Nations- business agenda, a crucial step for taking this cooperation forward at the highest levels of Organization management.

27. During the Summit, ministers and other high-level Government officials held a round table on the role of Governments in promoting responsible corporate citizenship. The ministerial round table concluded that Governments can and should support responsible business practices, for example by creating enabling environments, raising awareness, developing tools and providing funding for voluntary initiatives.

28. Also during the Summit, the African Union announced its commitment to improve corporate governance throughout the continent. In cooperation with the Global Compact Office, it will hold a private sector forum in coordination with the African Union Summit in January 2009.

III. Assessment of progress in building institutional capacity for effective partnering and remaining challenges

29. In resolution 60/215, the General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General take appropriate action to foster more effective relationships between the United Nations and the private sector. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes were asked to report on measures taken to implement the recommendations.

A. Training

30. Training is important for strengthening the management and furthering the effectiveness of partnerships, as it enhances the capacity of United Nations staff, as well as their counterparts in partner organizations, to deal with technical, legal and business planning issues and increases their skills in dealing with different organizational cultures.

31. Training modules and programmes focusing on building effective relationships with the private sector and other stakeholders are increasingly available. For example, the United Nations System Staff College has developed a course on the subject (Partnering skills for strategic engagement). Within one year of launching the programme in December 2005, over 150 United Nations staff members had participated in the course. In cooperation with the Global Compact Office, as well as several other agencies, funds and programmes, the United Nations System Staff College will launch the Global Compact omnibus training in late 2007. This new training format focuses on the Global Compact principles and will involve business leaders as well as staff members from the United Nations and civil society.

32. Recent experiences with training programmes throughout the United Nations system indicate that individual United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have specific training needs. The partnership capacities and skills that United Nations personnel need to strengthen depend on the thematic focus of the entity, the background of its staff and its dominant mode of cooperating with the private sector. To date, many United Nations entities have not offered any partnership-related training to their staff tailored to the mandate and work of their entity. For those that do offer training, a majority concentrate on soft skills, such as partnership

facilitation, process design and communication. Only a small minority include training relating to business planning, financial management or legal issues. No training on monitoring and evaluation techniques was reported.

B. Building institutional capacity in country offices

33. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes with country or regional offices report that they have taken measures to increase their local institutional capacity. The most common measure involved defining policies and procedures to be used when entering into partnerships. Approximately one third of organizations responding to the survey conducted for this report created or increased budget lines for partnerships or hired new, dedicated staff. Moreover, virtually all United Nations entities now have an assigned private sector focal point. These focal points serve as entry points for business partners, act as a link between private sector partners and United Nations management, and advocate on behalf of partnerships within their organizations.

34. The strengthening of capacity in country and regional offices is also reflected in changed partnership practices. An increasing number of partnerships are initiated at the country or regional level, with 40 per cent of surveyed United Nations entities initiating the majority of their partnerships at the local level.

35. Despite these improvements in institutional capacity, scope for progress exists. Most private sector focal points could fulfil their role more effectively if they were able to devote more time to it and had stronger support from management. Many United Nations entities also report difficulties in financing the core costs of partnership development. In particular, the creation of staff positions with dedicated time to act as partnership initiators and networkers remains a major challenge. Another challenge for United Nations agencies, funds or programmes with country or regional offices relates to building continuous management support for partnerships at all relevant levels. Support from senior managers at headquarters plays a crucial role, but it must be complemented by support from management at the country and regional office levels who determine work programmes and translate strategic priorities into practice.

C. Strategic focus and local ownership

36. To contribute effectively to the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations, the partnership activities of all agencies, funds and programmes need strategic focus. As stressed in the Monterrey Consensus of 2002, local ownership is an important condition for the success of development initiatives, including partnerships.

37. Over recent years, some agencies, funds and programmes have gone through strategy development processes to link their engagement with the private sector to their core organizational goals in the best way possible. Still, too often, partnerships are created on an ad hoc basis and lack a strategic perspective.

38. In terms of local ownership, United Nations entities report increased participation by local stakeholders in partnership operations. Most frequently, local

NGOs and governments are involved in planning and implementing initiatives. Groups of beneficiaries more frequently take part in the evaluation process.

Box 5
Good practice in engaging local stakeholders

The United Nations Development Programme Growing Sustainable Business Initiative seeks to engage business and local stakeholders in development, with a view to accelerating progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Full-time UNDP partnership brokers, predominately with business backgrounds, now operate in 14 countries. Their job consists of identifying and fostering opportunities for investment and designing cutting-edge business models at the intersection of market-based interests and development goals.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) also strongly involves local business in its work. As the core component of its development work, UNIDO seeks to reduce poverty by encouraging and enhancing micro, small and medium enterprises, enabling the poor to earn a living. In cooperation with local Governments, UNIDO helps to build needed technical infrastructure and provides capacity-building to upgrade productive and export capacities.

39. Led by the Global Compact Office, the Partnership Assessment Tool (PAT) to promote strategic planning was developed and launched in July 2007 jointly with UNDP, the United Nations Office for Partnerships, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and a private consulting firm. The tool is designed for both United Nations staff and corporate partners. It allows them to assess the sustainability and impact of United Nations-business partnerships ex-ante.

D. Sharing of best practices

40. To improve partnership selection and management, as well as to create the preconditions for effective scaling up and replication, it is critical to share best practices and lessons learned across the Organization.

41. The Global Compact Office has taken a range of measures in this context, in line with the request of the General Assembly in resolution 60/215. For example, the Global Compact Office organizes an annual meeting of United Nations private sector focal points. The last such meeting took place in Geneva in July 2007, with focal points, as well as some agency heads, in attendance. The previous such meeting was held in Paris in June 2006. In 2006, the Global Compact Office also began publishing the United Nations-Business Focal Point Information Bulletin. Consisting mainly of contributions from private sector focal points, this e-newsletter appears four times per year. It features information about new partnership projects, relevant tools, resources and events.

42. The Global Compact Office also has taken action to support the analysis of relationships between the United Nations and the private sector, with a specific

focus on identifying best practices and lessons learned. In 2005, it published Business UNusual: facilitating United Nations reform through partnerships. The report analyses the contribution of partnerships to the mission of the United Nations and assesses the partnership performance of the United Nations. During its 2007 Leaders Summit, the Global Compact Office launched Joining Forces for Change: demonstrating innovation and impact through United Nations-business partnerships. This publication helps disseminate good practices by profiling a broad spectrum of partnerships and underlining the win-win potential of partnerships, as well as the value of collaboration with the United Nations.

43. UNDP is actively promoting the analysis of partnerships and the role of business in development. In June 2007, it launched the multi-stakeholder initiative Growing inclusive markets. Building on the 2004 UNDP report Unleashing Entrepreneurship: making business work for the poor, this initiative analyses economic opportunities at the base of the economic pyramid and their development impact.

44. UNDP has also created innovative and informal ways to encourage the sharing of lessons learned at the regional level. In Eastern Europe, for example, a regional support group has been formed. Staff from various UNDP offices throughout the region communicate and share their experiences on a weekly basis through conference calls and online forums. At the global level, a discussion group allows for the exchange of experiences. To facilitate the integration of lessons learned, UNDP has published a range of toolkits for use by its country and regional offices.

45. The Secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development continues to contribute to the sharing of best practices and experiences. The Commission partnerships database now contains several hundred sustainable development partnerships with the United Nations. The Commission secretariat also continues to organize Commission partnership fairs, held as part of the official programme of the annual Commission meetings. Fairs provide partners with the opportunity to network, showcase progress, share lessons learned and exchange experiences.

46. The Global Compact Office also manages a database of corporate responsibility and partnership practices that can contribute to system-wide learning. The Global Compact website contains numerous materials, including business participants' Communication on progress reports, detailed case studies and case examples, which demonstrate how effective cooperation with the private sector and other stakeholders can advance the goals of the United Nations.

47. In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, the relief and reconstruction efforts by both public and private actors catalysed learning between the United Nations and the private sector. As emphasized in the 2006 report of the United Nations Special envoy for tsunami recovery, the international relief and recovery effort contained several general lessons for the management of disasters and recovery efforts, including the need to create international coordination mechanisms for the transition from relief to recovery and beyond, as well as the development of a broader disaster reduction and preparedness agenda. Responding to these challenges, several partnerships involving the United Nations and the private sector have emerged. One initiative is the Guiding Principles for Public-Private Collaboration for Humanitarian Action developed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in cooperation with a business association. The document serves as a guide to the private sector and the humanitarian community, with an

emphasis on communicating key humanitarian principles and integrating elements of lessons learned from previous private sector engagement.

Box 6

Good practice in implementing lessons learned from the tsunami recovery effort: disaster response teams

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs partners with a global logistics company in order to respond more effectively to sudden-onset natural disasters by troubleshooting airport bottlenecks. Disaster response teams, composed of trained volunteers from a corporate partner, remain on alert in regions at high risk for disaster and can be directly activated by the United Nations and any United Nations Member State. Applying their core competencies to humanitarian response, the Disaster response teams provide expert logistical support and advice to ensure an uninterrupted and effective supply chain at the disaster site airport for incoming shipment of relief goods. The scope of activities includes handling, warehousing and loading relief goods onto vehicles or helicopters for further distribution. Disaster response teams help local authorities with the surge of incoming goods during the critical first three weeks after a disaster.

E. Partner selection processes

48. Appropriate partner selection processes are critical to the success and impact of United Nations-private sector partnerships. First, they help the United Nations identify those private actors with potential for strategic, long-term cooperation that share Organization values. At the same time, partnering can involve significant risks for the reputation and integrity of the Organization. Adequate partner selection processes help manage these risks.

49. Efforts now are under way to facilitate more effective identification of new partners. A working group composed of several United Nations bodies, with the assistance of an international NGO, is working to improve the United Nations and Business website. New website design and software will provide a user-friendly language and logic, as well as an interactive platform through which the United Nations can more proactively and concertedly engage with business actors. A channelling function will match suitable company offers to the requirements of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

50. Additionally, in order to better screen potential partners, several United Nations entities, including UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund, World Food Programme, and OCHA, entered into an agreement with World-Check in April 2006. World-Check uses hundreds of thousands of public sources to track and create profiles for high-risk individuals and businesses, with the objective of uncovering hidden relationship networks and mitigating potential financial and reputational risks. Since World-Check has provided its service pro bono to the Organization, the agreement allows for all United Nations entities to make use of the collaboration.

51. Despite advances, the United Nations faces complex challenges with regard to the partner selection processes. While an increasing number of agencies, funds and programmes are relying on external screening agencies to gather information about potential private partners, further efforts need to be made. Nearly half of United Nations entities have no formal mechanism in place to identify suitable partners, in terms of strategies and policies aligned with United Nations goals. A clear majority of United Nations entities are passive in their approach to partner selection, typically reacting when approached by companies, but not searching proactively for partners. Moreover, there is no mechanism in place for systematically sharing information about private sector partner organizations across the system.

F. Streamlining of guidelines

52. Clear guidelines are crucial for enabling the United Nations to draw on the expertise and capacities of the private sector, while at the same time ensuring the integrity, independence and reputation of the Organization. Yet both United Nations staff and their external partners frequently cite legal hurdles as one of the most significant challenges for partnerships. Specific challenges include, for example, obtaining clarification on whether United Nations bodies may accept gratis personnel and pro bono services from companies. Guidelines and procedures should be adapted in a user-friendly way to make the United Nations more accessible to external partners and to allow personnel to develop effective partnerships in a timely manner.

53. Guidelines and procedures adopted by individual United Nations entities also differ. The Guidelines on cooperation between the United Nations and the business community, issued by the Secretary-General in 2000, serve as an important step towards increased coherence. As a follow-up to the private sector focal points meeting held last year, the Global Compact Office is currently creating an inventory of United Nations-business guidelines from across the system. The aim is to produce an updated set of guidelines that reflect the shared experience of the Organization since 2000. To this end, the Global Compact Office will consult and collect input from all relevant United Nations entities.

54. Also, some United Nations entities have begun in recent years to review and adapt their own guidelines. The International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research are among the United Nations entities adopting more streamlined guidelines for engaging with the private sector. To further strengthen its partnership capabilities, the International Atomic Energy Agency is conducting a benchmarking exercise on best practices in partnership management, with plans to streamline its policies and processes by the end of 2007.

G. Impact assessment

55. Strong management and a strategic approach to partnering necessitate reliable and informative ways to monitor and evaluate partnerships. Improved evaluation helps ensure accountability and effective partnership management, as it provides the basis for strategically selecting and scaling up partnerships.

56. The significance of monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment for partnerships has been recognized by most United Nations entities. The vast majority of partnerships surveyed for this report undergo formal evaluation, with entities applying general United Nations tools and methods to assess their standard partnership activities. This approach furthers the integration of partnerships into the mainstream activities of the United Nations, however, partnerships can have different characteristics than do other technical development programmes. Therefore, some of the surveyed agencies, funds or programmes have developed special frameworks for evaluating partnerships. Increasingly, the criteria for evaluating partnerships are negotiated and agreed upon with other partner organizations and included in formal partnership agreements.

Box 7
Good practice in monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment

The World Food Programme bases its approach for monitoring and evaluation on a best practice partnership example identified after experiments with various processes. The World Food Programme organizes its partnership activities in teams working with detailed planning matrixes from the beginning of each initiative. Teams briefly report on a quarterly or biannual basis on their progress vis-à-vis the objectives and targets set during the initial stages of the partnership. Senior management then reviews the reports and presents them to their steering committee for discussion and any necessary adjustments. In addition to formal reporting, management remains in contact with corporate partners through frequent, informal phone conversations. The World Food Programme now increasingly uses this process as standard practice.

The World Bank Development Grant Facility has developed an approach to the monitoring and evaluation of their global and regional programmes — many of which feature private sector participation — which other organizations may be able to build on. Under rules established in 1997, every partnership funded through the Development Grant Facility must conduct independent external evaluations every three to five years, in addition to providing annual financial and progress reports. Part of the Development Grant Facility grant may be applied towards the cost of this evaluation, and renewed funding decisions for long-term programmes are linked to evaluation results. In addition, the Independent evaluation group of the World Bank has developed a publicly available sourcebook with standard approaches for global programme reviews that also consider partnership performance issues.

57. These examples show how agreed targets and criteria, combined with the use of relevant technology, can improve both the accuracy and practicality of evaluations. The practice of including targets and evaluation criteria in partnership agreements should become more widespread. Moreover, many agencies, funds and programmes could benefit from the development and adoption of tools and methods

which are easier to use, such as the Partnership Assessment Tool. In addition, no agencies reported conducting training on how to use existing monitoring and evaluation methods. Increased training could improve the uptake of existing and new tools and methods as well as the quality of evaluations.

IV. Recommendations

58. The United Nations is learning to take better advantage of its institutional capacities to form effective relationships with the private sector and other stakeholders; however, scope for further improvement exists both at the level of individual funds, agencies and programmes and at the system level. Regarding the reforms requested by the General Assembly in resolution 60/215, further steps need to be taken by all actors. For the United Nations, the following concrete steps would be beneficial:

A. Tailor training to needs and rely on more diverse sources for training

59. An increase in the effectiveness of training courses requires that their content be tailored to the needs of concerned United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. For instance, staff engaged in partnerships for poverty reduction require different skills than those addressing environmental sustainability, humanitarian relief or peace and security.

60. To meet these differentiated training needs and expand training coverage, the United Nations should rely on a more diverse set of training providers. For example, internal trainings provided by legal offices could increase understanding of the legal issues relevant to partnerships. The United Nations could also make better use of the training facilities of corporate partners. Joint trainings with corporate staff could not only enhance business planning and financial management skills, but also improve communication and understanding with private sector partners. The Global Compact Office could assist United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in reaching out to suitable corporate partners for training purposes.

B. Strengthen private sector focal points and extend recognition for partnership development

61. To enable United Nations private sector focal points to develop their full potential, their position within the system needs to be strengthened. Firstly, the focal points require sufficient dedicated staff time to focus on issues related to effective relationships with the private sector. Secondly, the focal points should have more direct links and communication with senior managers. Finally, management should encourage staff with a background in business to fill focal point positions and conduct exchanges between the United Nations and corporate actors.

62. To further strengthen the commitment of United Nations staff to build effective relationships with the private sector and to build political will at all levels, partnership activities should enjoy increased recognition throughout the Organization. To do so, United Nations entities could include effective partnership

building skills in promotion decisions, introduce an award scheme for the most successful partnership builders and involve senior management when recognizing accomplishments in cooperation.

C. Strengthen strategic planning for engaging the private sector

63. Crucially, each United Nations agency, fund or programme that has not already done so should engage in a strategy development process to align its institutional comparative advantage with its approach to engaging business. Diverse fields of operation and variations in size and organizational composition mean that United Nations entities can achieve varying benefits, as well as face different risks, when building new relationships with the private sector.

64. Tools, such as the partnership assessment tool, should be widely used by those who authorize and design partnerships. Greater efforts should be made to enable and encourage the application of the Partnership Assessment Tool.

D. Increase dissemination and uptake of mechanisms for sharing lessons

65. Additional steps can further enhance the effectiveness of the exchange of best practices and the sharing of lessons learned. First, the United Nations can encourage the increased use, uptake and active participation in existing learning tools and forums. Increased participation in private sector focal point meetings and continued contributions to the United Nations-Business Focal Point Information Bulletin are necessary to derive maximum benefit from these tools. Second, some learning tools could become more focused. For example, the private sector focal point meetings could include learning sessions on specific topics, such as partner selection, and continue the debate in dedicated working groups. In cooperation with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, the Global Compact Office should continue to facilitate this process. Finally, active participation and commitment by staff involved in partnerships is required for effective sharing of lessons learned. Time and resource constraints which inhibit active participation in learning activities should therefore be addressed.

E. Improve partner identification and selection

66. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes should develop a more rigorous and proactive approach to identifying suitable partners from the private sector. For example, participation in the Global Compact could serve as a common basic criterion for partner selection, since organizations demonstrate their commitment to the values of the United Nations by pledging to implement the ten principles of the Global Compact. Additionally, in order to enhance coherence and cost-efficiency in the partner selection process, as well as to reduce risk, an improved information system should be developed jointly by United Nations entities. It is essential that the results of enquiries, as well as relevant experiences with problematic partners, are shared across the Organization through an internal database or early warning mechanism.

F. Update the United Nations-business guidelines

67. To enhance the practicality and application of internal legal processes, it is critical to update the Guidelines on cooperation between the United Nations and the business community. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes should support the updating of these guidelines by enhancing communication among different legal offices and actively contribute to the current updating process.

68. Within United Nations entities, direct cooperation between those engaged in partnerships and the respective legal offices should be improved, for example through joint trainings and joint revision of existing guidelines. The development of tools or checklists for better risk management, as well as the creation of standard partnership agreements, could further facilitate this process.

G. Create and disseminate tools for impact assessment

69. A first step towards effective monitoring and evaluation involves setting measurable targets from the outset. Partners should agree together on prioritized objectives, as well as on how and when they will measure progress along the way. A checklist incorporated into a memorandum of understanding is one method of encouraging early commitment to monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.

70. In order to promote this practice, as well as other impact assessment mechanisms, tools and good practices should be systematically collected and exchanged across the United Nations system. In addition, new tools facilitating the practical implementation of evaluations and impact assessments, such as the Partnership Assessment Tool, should be used widely by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

V. Conclusions

71. Strategic engagement with the private sector and other stakeholders is proving to be an effective method for advancing United Nations goals. This cooperation first emerged, and has since evolved, based on an understanding that although the goals of the United Nations and the private sector are quite distinct, there are overlapping objectives — for example, building markets, combating corruption, safeguarding the environment and ensuring social inclusion.

72. Today's unprecedented cooperation between the United Nations and the private sector is also driven by a recognition that many of the world's most pressing problems are too complex for any one sector to face alone. Thus, the private sector has increasingly become an active partner in helping the Organization to achieve its goals, marking a new chapter in United Nations-business relations which had been highly limited until the 1990s. The voluntary nature of the United Nations-business cooperation ensures that related activities are not in competition with Government actions, but rather are a complementary way of advancing United Nations goals. Across the United Nations, various approaches and strategies for engaging with the private sector are being used, including values-based engagements that lead to normative and operational actions, broad sectoral efforts and time-bound partnerships.

73. To realize the full potential of the rapidly intensifying cooperation with the private sector, the United Nations must continue to take appropriate steps, both at the level of individual agencies, funds and programmes and at the broader system level.

74. Over the past two years, most United Nations entities have made progress in strengthening private sector relationships. Given the extensive and expanding nature of these relationships, there remains significant room to increase scale, effectiveness and accountability within entities working with the private sector, particularly in the following ways: tailoring training to needs and relying on more diverse sources for training; strengthening private sector focal points and extending recognition for partnership development; strengthening strategic planning for engaging the private sector; increasing dissemination and uptake of mechanisms for sharing lessons; improving partner identification and selection; updating the United Nations-business guidelines; and creating and disseminating tools for impact assessment.

75. Additionally, increased caretaking of the United Nations-business relationship is required to ensure that the appropriate support and focus are provided to implement the actions recommended in this report. To date, the Global Compact Office, through collaboration with numerous United Nations entities, including the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships and the United Nations System Staff College, has exercised a leadership role in this regard. With a mission to advance United Nations values among the global business community and a public-private governance structure specifically tailored for diverse stakeholders, the Global Compact Office has shown itself to be uniquely positioned and capable of leading efforts to develop more strategic and effective relationships with the private sector, in accordance with its mandate from the General Assembly.

76. Carrying forward cooperation between the United Nations and the private sector in a manner that increases scale, effectiveness and accountability, while safeguarding Organization integrity, requires the support of the General Assembly. Additionally, the Global Compact Office will require a stronger mandate to intensify its efforts in this regard.